mn DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Adverse Childhood Experiences in Minnesota: Foster Care System and Out-of-Home Placement Involvement

Foster care system involvement and out-of-home placements are often prompted by abuse or neglect concerns, and youth with these experiences report higher levels of traumatic experiences (Engler et al., 2022; Fratto, 2016; Mariscal et al., 2015). Moreover, involvement with the foster care system and/or out of-home placements can also cause harm to youth by disrupting family relationships and may lead to negative experiences in foster homes or other placement settings. Foster care involvement and out-of-home placement are linked to poorer outcomes related to education, employment, housing, income, physical health, mental health, and substance use (Engler et al., 2022; Gypen et al., 2017; Orri et al., 2021). For the most current local data on the percentage of youth reporting they have ever been involved in the foster care system, please visit MDH's interactive Adverse Childhood Experiences Data (www.web.health.state.mn.us/communities/ace/data/index.html).

Relevant indicator(s):

■ Out-of-home placements

■ Foster care involvement

Strategies for promoting healthy parenting practices can also address foster care system involvement.

Despite these challenges, several strategies can reduce or prevent the negative impacts from these experiences and promote resilience and well-being.

Effective strategies

Strategies for supporting youth with experience in the foster care system include:

■ **Kinship placements**, in which placements with relatives or other adults who have an existing caring relationship with the youth are prioritized over placements with adults the youth does not know (Casey Family Programs, 2023). For American Indian youth, kinship placements also include those with adults from the same tribe. Placements should also aim to keep siblings together rather than placing siblings in separate households. If kinship is not an option, agencies should dedicate time and resources to determining the best placement fit according to the youth's needs and identity.

■ **Involving youth in decision-making** to ensure they have say in decisions made about their placements and other services, provide an opportunity to practice decision-making skills, and promote a sense of empowerment and agency (Casey Family Programs, 2023).

■ **Training, clinical services, and other supports for foster caregivers** to help them understand trauma and the experiences of youth involved in the foster care systems, address behavior concerns, develop caregiving skills, navigate, and access services they may be eligible for, and improve relationships between caregivers and youth (Casey Family Programs, 2018; Casey Family Programs, 2023; Mariscal et al., 2015). Foster caregivers may also benefit from general parenting skills education programs. Additionally, it is important to

ensure foster caregivers have ongoing access to other types of support, such as support groups, respite services, and childcare assistance, and that administrative requirements and processes are minimally burdensome.

■ **Family therapy and supports for birth parents** to promote positive and healthy communication and strengthen relationships (Casey Family Programs, 2023).

■ **Case management, clinical services, and other supports for youth** can provide youth with additional social support and caring relationships with adults, promote well-being and coping skills, encourage positive identity and youth development, improve mental health, avoid placement altogether or placement disruption, and address any behavioral concerns (Bezeczky et al., 2020; Casey Family Programs, 2023; Häggman-Laitila et al., 2019; Mariscal et al., 2015; Steenbakkers et al, 2018). In addition to clinical services and case management, other supports that can benefit youth include academic and tutoring services and programs that promote healthy relationships and belonging (Dworsky et al., 2014).

■ **Aftercare services** to support youth aging out of foster care. These services help youth with a wide range of topics, including employment, housing, transportation, childcare, relationships and social skills, and personal finance (Dworsky et al., 2014; Edelstein & Lowenstein, 2014a; Edelstein & Lowenstein, 2014b; Pergamit & McDaniel, 2023).

■ **Training and supports for providers and professionals** to ensure a strong understanding of trauma and the foster care experience, avoid placement disruptions, and reduce turnover and the subsequent disruption of the relationship between the professional and the youth (Casey Family Programs, 2023). Supports range widely and may include policies for ensuring caseloads are reasonable, flexible scheduling, or using a team-based model for serving youth.

Examples of Minnesota initiatives

Connections to Independence (C2i)

Connections to Independence provides a wide range of services and resources for youth who have been involved with the foster care system, with a focus on supporting youth's transition into adulthood and living independently. C2i staff build trusting and caring relationships with youth and provide education and guidance on a wide range of topics, such as housing, education, employment, and social and personal development. C2i also provides events, group activities, field trips, arts and physical activities, and aftercare for youth who have aged out of the foster care system.

For more information about [Connections to Inependence (www.c2iyouth.org/)](www.c2iyouth.org/)

Ramsey County's Specialty Respite Care Program

The Specialty Respite Care program through Ramsey County facilitates brief stays in specialty respite care foster homes for youth with high support needs, such as youth with fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, autism, and other disabilities.

More information about [Specialty Respite Care Providers (www.ramseycounty.us/sites/default/files/Departments/Community%20Human%20Services/Specialty%20Respite%20Care%20Provider%20Brochure_1.pdf)](www.ramseycounty.us/sites/default/files/Departments/Community%20Human%20Services/Specialty%20Respite%20Care%20Provider%20Brochure_1.pdf)

Examples of national initiatives

Treatment Foster Care

Treatment Foster Care is an alternative to out-of-home foster care placements, allowing youth to remain in a family setting by supporting youth and caregivers. It aims to promote academic engagement and achievement, healthy peer relationships, positive parenting practices, and a consistent and structured home environment with clear expectations and consequences. Services involve trainings, group support, and coaching.

More information about [Treatment Foster Care Oregon (www.tfcoregon.com/)](www.tfcoregon.com/)

Kinship Navigator Program at the Georgia Division of Family & Child Services

The Kinship Navigator Program provides service navigation assistance, information, and referrals to kinship caregivers. The program aims to support kinship families by promoting well-being and stability across several areas, such as finances, relationships, and housing. By supporting families, the program ultimately promotes placement permanency and ensures youth who are involved in the foster care system can stay with relatives and avoid non-kinship placements.

More information about the [Kinship Navigator Program (dhs.georgia.gov/kinship-care-portal/kinship-navigator-program)](dhs.georgia.gov/kinship-care-portal/kinship-navigator-program)

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